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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 USNATO 000287

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TAGS: NATO PREL MARR

SUBJECT: NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL ASSESSES MACEDONIA'S MAP PROGRESS

Classified By: A/POLAD A. "Hoot" Baez
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: On July 1 Macedonian Foreign Minister Antonio Milososki and Defense Minister Zoran Konjanovski told the North Atlantic Council (NAC) that Macedonia was committed to finding a mutually-acceptable solution to the name dispute and taking its place as a NATO Ally. They also announced a potential 46 percent increase in troop deployments to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). END SUMMARY.

What's in a name?

¶12. (C) Foreign Minister Milososki remarked that "the crossroads of history and geography have not always been generous" to Macedonia, and told the NAC that the decision taken at the 2008 Bucharest Summit to extend an invitation for membership to Macedonia as soon as a mutually-acceptable solution to the name issue had been reached was sobering." He confirmed that the government would continue to actively and productively participate in un-sponsored talks to resolve the name issue. He noted that more than 90 percent of the population still supports NATO membership for Macedonia. Drawing analogies between the inaugural address of President Obama and the name dispute, Milososki remarked that it was time to set aside childish things and carry forward the promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.

¶13. (C) The Greek Permanent Representative (PermRep) noted that the smooth integration of the western Balkans required nations to assume the full obligations of good neighborly relations. He also encouraged all efforts to speed up and successfully conclude the name dispute so that a "win-win" situation could be achieved. Allies, including Greece, roundly endorsed the Bucharest decision to welcome Macedonia to the table as soon as the name dispute was resolved.

Not "perfect," but reforming

¶14. (C) At the conclusion of Macedonia's tenth MAP cycle, Foreign Minister Milososki acknowledged that his country had not been a "perfect" candidate for membership. At the same time, he stressed that there was no other destination for

Skopje than NATO. He said that the April 2009 elections proved that electoral reforms such as shifting the maintenance of voting lists from the purview of the justice ministry to the electoral commission have improved the process, but further improvements were needed. On judicial reform, Milososki said that Macedonia had moved to a system of elected judges and increased the judicial budget 11 percent. In the last two years the disposition of cases had increased 25 percent. He noted the latest Transparency International index, which showed that Macedonia improved from 105th place in 2006 to 72th in 2008. Referring to the global economic crisis, Milososki said that Macedonia's policy was to maintain its macroeconomic stability, as well as its monetary rate. He briefed that Macedonia recognized Kosovo's independence in 2008 and would work to support the development of a multi-ethnic society in that country. At the same time, he said that relations with Serbia -- which suffered after Macedonia recognized Kosovo's independence -- were beginning to warm again.

¶ 15. (C) Foreign Minister Milososki and Defense Minister Konjanovski announced that Macedonia was considering a 46 percent increase in troops deployments to the NATO led ISAF operation in Afghanistan; He also said Macedonia might deploy the South-Eastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG) to a UN peacekeeping operation in the future. Konjanovski reported that Macedonia was developing a small, strong, and mobile army, and announced the reopening of the Macedonian military academy later this year. He also announced the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement on ethnic power-sharing

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had resulted in ethnic minorities comprising 29 percent of the soldiers and non-commissioned officers corps, and 19 percent of the officers corps. Macedonia hoped to provide training to the Kosovo military as soon as diplomatic relations between the two countries were established. He stated that the global economic crisis, which will result in an 18 percent defense budget decrease, will result in the postponement -- but not cancellation -- of the purchase of a helicopter to replace one lost in Operation ALTHEA. Foreign Minister Milososki even credited Greece with donating two helicopters to its fleet.

¶ 16. (SBU) Milososki also invited the NAC to visit Skopje in autumn 2009.

Comment

¶ 17. (C) With the exception of a short exchange describing the alleged inflexibility of Greece in the run up to Bucharest, this meeting with Macedonia was much more cordial than similar recent meetings. Since Bucharest, Macedonia's frustration at being left at the altar by the Alliance has often resulted in less-than-constructive interventions by Macedonian officials during meetings at NATO, losing Skopje valuable good will. However, on this occasion the Macedonians arrived at NATO well-prepared, well-rehearsed, and had a polite answer to every question -- perhaps signaling the beginning of a more constructive post-Bucharest NATO-Macedonian relationship.

DAALDER